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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000605

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: IN A SIGNIFICANT MOVE, FAL ACKNOWLEDGES PAST HUMAN  
RIGHTS ABUSES AND DEPORTEES

REF: A. 05 NOUAKCHOTT 1191  
[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 562

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- In a speech in the southern city of Selibaby May 12, Col. Fal for the first time used the word "deportees" in describing those who were expelled from Mauritania during the "1989 Events", insisting that a solution must be found by all Mauritians, and not subject to pressure by groups or outside influences.

-- "Our country experienced painful events in 1989," Fal said at a speech in the southeastern city of Kaedi on May 13, saying the human rights abuses were provoked by extremists who do not share Mauritanian values. This is the first time a Mauritanian head of state has admitted such abuses even occurred.

-- Public reaction to Fal's speeches was mixed, with many applauding the move to acknowledge these highly sensitive issues, and others calling on Fal to go further and take responsibility for what happened.

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(C) Comments  
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-- Fal's acknowledgment of the human rights abuses and his use of the word "deportees" represents a significant step forward in addressing these extremely sensitive issues.

-- These issues, which have smoldered for decades, have found new freedom under Fal. They are drawing increasing focus from Mauritania's civil and political ranks (ref B).

End Key Points and Comments.

[1](#)1. (U) Colonel Fal visited three of Mauritania's southeastern regions May 12-14 as part of a national presidential tour that began April 28. Fal's speeches focused on the democratic transition and the National Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 25, but also addressed other national topics such as the tens of thousands of refugees

that fled south between 1989 and 1991 -- a period referred to as the 1989 Events -- to escape ethnic violence (ref B).

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FAL DISCUSSES DEPORTEES  
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¶2. (U) Fal said in his speech in Selibaby May 12 "I consider the question of deportees, whatever their number, to be a question that we must resolve," adding that "the solution must be acceptable to all Mauritarians." Fall stressed that these problems were "Mauritanian problems," to which we must find "Mauritanian solutions."

¶3. (U) Significantly, this is the first time since the events took place that a Mauritanian head of state has publicly used the word "deportees" to describe the victims. According to the Arabic text of the speech (delivered in Arabic) published in the official Arabic-language newspaper "ash-Sha'ab" and confirmed by several people who heard the speech, Fal used the word "deportees" (mouba'doun). However, in the French translation provided by the French-language official newspaper "Horizons", the word was translated as "refugees".

¶4. (U) Fal introduced the topic by saying he wanted to raise "the issue of what some call deportees." I want to discuss this issue in front of you...and with those listening on the other side of the river," (in Senegal). He went on to say that the refugee problem "doesn't merely concern one group or one tribe or one ethnicity...but it concerns all Mauritanian people and the Mauritanian State."

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FAL DISCUSSES HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES  
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¶5. (U) At his speech in the southeastern city of Kaedi the next day, Fal spoke in both Arabic and French, and for the first time used the French term "passif humanitaire", a term loosely translated to mean human rights abuses, but understood throughout Mauritania to mean the government abuses during the 1989 Events, to include extrajudicial killings, deportations, expropriations and stripping of citizenship.

¶6. (U) He said, "Our country experienced painful events in 1989," adding that "these events were triggered by extremists that totally ignored our values." He then reiterated that any solution must be a national one, adding, "We do not want solutions that lead towards hate, division and intolerance. Hate and settling of accounts have brought nothing to the peoples of the world but evil and desolation. Forgiveness, mutual acceptance, dialogue and creativity, on the other hand, are what we need to bring about our own solutions to our own problems, on the basis of our national realities."

¶7. (U) According to "Horizons," Fal emphasized that the Mauritians had "the intelligence and capacity to find our own solutions...at our own pace, slowly but surely. And we will step up the speed when the conditions allow us to." However, several observers noted Fal used the expressions "a camel's pace" and "a horse's pace" to describe the two speeds meaning that Fal had, intentionally or not, alluded to the difference between the Moorish nomadic culture and the Afro-Mauritanian sedentary culture.

¶8. (U) Fal's only other public reference to the subjects came in response to an October 10, 2005 press conference question about the return of Mauritanian refugees from abroad, in which Fal said "it would be cowardly to avoid addressing a national issue," and that the interim government would look for a "Mauritanian solution" to the issue at the appropriate time (ref A).

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PUBLIC REACTION  
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¶9. (C) Public reaction to the speeches was mixed. In a meeting with Ambassador May 16, Cisse Amadou Cheikhou, president of the Afro-Mauritanian political party Alliance for Justice and Democracy, said "we are glad that Fal has acknowledged what happened...but now he must take responsibility." Cisse said that only by this transitional government taking responsibility will the next government be obliged to take additional steps to resolve what happened.

¶10. (C) Cisse and others commented on the tone of Fal's speech. "He appeared angry when he spoke," Cisse said, explaining that "Fal felt he was under attack in the southern region that was most affected by the 1989 Events." "He felt a tremendous pressure to address the events to try and lessen this pressure," he said.

¶11. (C) Cisse also believes that Fal and others in the government are afraid of the current charges being filed against former President Taya in Belgium for crimes committed during the 1989 Events. "Fal and members of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy were close to these events, and they don't want to be tried alongside Taya," Cisse explained.

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SUPPORT FOR THE REFERENDUM  
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¶12. (U) The majority of Fal's speeches focused on other national issues, in particular, the National Constitutional Referendum scheduled for June 25. Fal urged listeners to support the referendum, saying that "it is essential for our people that the Constitutional revisions be approved." Fal explained how the amendments would limit the presidential term to five years, limit presidents to serving two terms, and make the constitution "un-amendable." Fal said such

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changes would help to "stop the prolonging of power," whereby a leader comes to power and refuses to leave.

¶13. (U) Other national issues Fal addressed included the elimination of corruption, the need to reduce racial tensions, and the importance of the Mauritanian people deciding for themselves what the future of their country should look like.

LeBaron